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SUCCESS STORY

First Sudanese Independent Media Center Established



Journalists committed to highlighting the needs of marginalized communities tour an IDP camp near Khartoum.

The USAID/OTI-supported media center raises public awareness of the civic and political rights granted to citizens under Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

October 2007 – After decades of violent conflict, Sudan's hope for a peaceful future has been renewed by the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). For true peace to be realized, however, Sudan's citizens will need to understand, appreciate, and exercise the civic and political rights granted by the CPA.

Sudan's independent media has a vital role to play in democratizing the CPA and making its relatively unpublicized contents known to the general public, and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has seized an opportunity to support the media in this role by assisting a small group of well-known journalists and scholars to open an independent media center in Khartoum – the first of its kind in Sudan.

Following years of restrictive government legislation and harassment, media rights activists were eager to take advantage of a narrow window of press freedom that has emerged since the signing of the CPA. The center aims to strengthen independent media channels and to empower Sudanese citizens to advocate for full implementation of the peace agreement.

Members of the center offer their services and sector expertise – in journalism, media rights, gender, and more – on a voluntary basis. They conduct forums, offer trainings, and prepare publications on CPA-related issues. A recent issue of the center's newsletter highlighted the debate on the role of media vis-à-vis the CPA, emphasizing the need to monitor and report on progress and infringements in its implementation.

At a recent forum, participants discussed how the CPA affects Sudan's internally displaced persons (IDPs), who still number in the millions. IDP leaders from various tribes were invited to attend and discuss key issues, such as the right of IDPs to return home, customary law, and reconciliation efforts taking place in camps on the outskirts of Khartoum. After the forum, the center articulated the leaders' concerns in its newsletter, giving the marginalized community a voice and drawing the public's attention to the importance of implementing the CPA in its entirety.